

Recognition Programs Foster Staff Satisfaction

Featured here are programs that El Paso County, Texas, and Multnomah County, Oregon, have established to recognize staff for outstanding service.

El Paso County's Officer of the Quarter Program

The El Paso County Sheriffs Department began its Detention Officer of the Quarter program in 1987. The program was implemented to strengthen staff morale and to recognize outstanding work done by detention officers.

The detention facility employs about 275 detention officers. They are divided into four shifts, three of which are responsible for inmate floor operations. The fourth is a support services shift.

Every quarter the detention commander asks shift commanders to submit the names of candidates who qualify for Officer of the Quarter. Nominations include a synopsis of reasons for selecting the officer, along with data supporting the officer's exceptional performance during the previous three months.

Once the candidates' names are received, the detention commander requests the commanders of the patrol, detective, and civil divisions to each appoint one of their supervi-

sors to serve on a committee to evaluate the candidates. To be eligible for the committee, supervisors must be civil or uniformed employees who conduct performance evaluations. Detention facility supervisors may not participate in the committee, and committee members cannot serve in two consecutive quarters.

The committee is given guidelines defining the basic criteria for outstanding performance. Examples include an officer who repeatedly or frequently discovers contraband on inmates being processed for intake or an officer who, through his/her own initiative, took action to save an inmate from serious injury.

In its final selection the committee emphasizes:

- The seriousness and importance of the incident(s).
- The individual's initiative.
- Consistency of outstanding performance.
- Motivation.
- The impact of the officer's performance on overall operations.

Nominees are not required to be interviewed, but they can be; at times the selection committee does

not know the name of the officer until a final selection has been made.

On reaching a decision, the committee submits to the detention commander the names of the officers who were nominated, the name of the officer selected as Officer of the Quarter, and a short explanation of

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the committee's reasons for selecting that person.

The sheriff and/or the detention commander presents a framed certificate of recognition to the officer in front of his/her peers at a shift briefing. The officer also receives free parking for a quarter in the facility's parking lot, a real benefit in an area where parking is scarce and expensive. A photo of the officer is placed in a highly visible location, and the department's next newsletter includes an announcement of the officer's award.

One question the sheriffs department also considered was whether to allow officers from the support services shift to participate in the Officer of the Quarter program each quarter. We initially found that personnel from the support services

shift were front runners for the award more often than staff from other shifts. This is because of support services' automatic exposure to high profile incidents, such as mail personnel seizing contraband or intake processing personnel finding weapons or contraband on incoming prisoners.

Our solution was to allow support services personnel to participate in the competition every other quarter, or twice a year. Having floor shift personnel competing among only themselves during other quarters has been successful in motivating them to excel in performing their duties.

In addition to encouraging officers to perform well the Officer of the Quarter program motivates supervisors to get to know more about their subordinates performance.

For further information, contact Captain Ray Ramirez, Jail Administrator, El Paso County Jail, El Paso, Texas, 79941-0125; phone (915) 546-2228. ■

Multnomah County's Peak Performer Program

Many employees of the Multnomah County corrections branch are hard working, professional, and dedicated to their jobs. We wanted to recognize these individuals in a way that was more formal than a word of praise but less formal than the established department award system. The department's system is designed to reward "heroic" or highly exceptional activity, but we were inter-

ested in recognizing the many staff who simply perform their jobs in an exemplary manner every day. We spent several months trying to determine a name for this program, and having rejected the old standards, we finally came up with the Peak Performer Award.

Our next goal was to determine a method of selecting recipients. This was a critical phase because, if it were handled incorrectly, staff might construe the award as an indication of who is "sucking up to the boss." To avoid that trap we established a staff committee that meets each quarter to review all nominations. The nomination process is open to all staff, and forms are distributed to **all 480** persons assigned to the corrections branch. The chief deputy's newsletter also encourages nominations every quarter.

The committee selects the most deserving individuals each quarter. The number to be selected, usually from three to six, is determined by the number of nominations received. All corrections staff are eligible to receive the award. To date, the committee has selected custody staff, warehouse workers, records clerks, and maintenance personnel.

The committee considers any of the following criteria in determining recipients of Peak Performer Awards:

- A consistent level of performance that is significantly above the requirements of the job.

- Exceptional resourcefulness or initiative on one or more occasions.
- On- or off-duty activities.
- Contributions to the improvement of the Corrections Branch.
- Performance that benefits the Multnomah County Sheriffs Office or Multnomah County; or other outstanding personal or public accomplishments.
- Characteristically, a lack of other recognition for their contributions.

The names of those chosen are forwarded to the chief deputy, who arranges for individual plaques to be engraved. The plaques are awarded to designated recipients at their assigned place of work (one of five jails throughout the county) on their assigned shift. Peak Performers' names are also added to a large plaque displayed in the administration area and announced in the chief's newsletter.

The success of a program like this is difficult to **measure**. However, the feedback has been positive; I can't help but feel that it sends a message to staff that the management really does care.

For further information contact John Schweitzer, Chief Deputy, Corrections Branch, Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, 1120 S.W. Third Avenue, Portland, Oregon, 97204; phone (503) 248-5091. ■